

# XY How should neighbouring states cooperate in the management of diversity?

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The traditional vision of nation-states as linguistically homogenous societies has never been a very realistic one, and is becoming less so in an age of mobility where people frequently move across state boundaries. A new approach to the management of diversity does not only refer to international protection of minority rights, but also regards bilateral cooperation between states.

One question that arises then is how neighboring states can cooperate in this field and, in particular, how features of “reciprocity” can be “worked into” a bilateral cooperation in order to broaden the language rights of minority ethno-linguistic communities.

### What does research tell us?

The formation of homogenizing states, border shifts, voluntary and mandatory population exchanges, assimilatory state policies, inter- and intra-state power asymmetries have established a context in which minorities often are in a disadvantaged position. Besides the international regime of minority rights, the triangular relationship between “kin-states”, “host states” and national minorities (Brubaker 1996) offers a good starting point for understanding neighborly relations in this aspect. First of all, the concept of “kin state” must be applied with caution, avoiding an “essentialist” reading of language and identity. It makes sense, for example, in the case of Hungarian speakers living in Transylvania, Danish and German speakers living in Schleswig and Holstein. In contrast, it does not make sense for French, Italian or German speakers living in Switzerland, who do not consider themselves French, Italians or Germans, nor regard France, Italy and Germany as their “kin states” (a shared language

does not necessarily imply a common history and the same identity). In sum, the notion of ethnolinguistic kinship is politically charged and difficult to handle, but it frequently occurs and requires deft treatment (Halász 2006). Neighboring states usually co-operate on political issues on a reciprocal basis. When identity issues, minority rights are on the agenda between a “kin-state” and a “host-state”, bilateral co-operation and reciprocity may be particularly problematic.

In bilateral relations reciprocity in this case may be understood either as a set of mutual, but unilateral measures supporting respective “kin-minorities” or a legal reciprocity enshrined in bilateral agreements. Under international law, the unilateral support of a kin-state for its kin-minorities living abroad, can only be accepted in exceptional cases (in the field of culture, education or language services – see Venice Commission 2001). Specific bilateral treaties targeting minorities are rare, but treaties on good-neighborly relations often include minority rights provisions – in most cases on an equal footing (see Arp 2008).

### Illustration and evidence

Some cases present a degree of symmetry (for example in the case of the Danish minority in northern Germany and of the German minority in southern Denmark), making reciprocity a natural strategy for the national governments concerned, as exemplified by the joint Bonn-Copenhagen 1955 declaration regarding the reciprocal treatment of the Danish and German minorities on either side of the border. In the midst of ethnic wars in former Yugoslavia and rising ethnic tensions in CEE, the 1992 Slovenian-Hungarian treaty on minorities provided also a good example for

the same reciprocal approach. But as both cases show, reciprocity works only in those cases where the “kin-minority” communities living on both sides of the border are of similar demographic size. In many situations, however, reciprocity is more difficult to implement because of demolinguistic asymmetry. For example, there is a tiny, largely assimilated Croat minority living in Italy, while there is a sizeable Italian minority living in Croatia. Following the collapse of Yugoslavia, Italy was able to achieve a treaty between Italy and Croatia concerning minority rights (1996), where this asymmetry is evident (most provisions refer to Croatia’s duties vis-à-vis its Italian minority). Even though in another, similar context, the 1995 bilateral treaty provisions regarding minorities in Slovakia and Hungary respectively are formulated in a full reciprocal language, whereas the Hungarian minority in Slovakia is around twenty times more numerous than the Slovak minority in Hungary. As in all inter-state relations, power relations, the wider international community’s approach and other non-legal elements may be determining for bilateral co-operation on minority rights. As the case of Vojvodina (a Serbian region bordering Hungary where different minority communities live) shows, language may be particularly important in this aspect. Most of the daily struggles over national choices are related to language use in public. In fact, a strong correlation between the public use of Hungarian and the demographic ratio of Hungarians can be observed – the willingness to choose the minority language is negatively correlated with the symbolic dominance of the linguistic majority. On the other hand the close links with Hungary, migratory tendencies and access to Hungarian citizenship potentially increase the social prestige of minority language in specific situations.

### Policy implications

Neighborly cooperation between states is only partly covered by international agreements. Unilateral measures adopted by kin-states supporting their “kin-minorities”, like financial support or extraterritorial citizenship are also relevant. States should take better into account the specific needs and situation of the different minority communities, thus refusing automatic reciprocity. On the other side, unilateral kin-state policies should be better coordinated with “host-states” in order to provide a meaningful support for minorities. Against this background extraterritorial citizenship can help members of kin-minorities creating contexts related mostly to migration and international mobility in which they can manifest (identify and be categorized) as members of a transborder nation.

### References and further reading:

Arp, B. (2008). *International Norms and Standards for the Protection of National Minorities*. The Hague: Brill.

Brubaker, R. (1996). *Nationalism Reframed*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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Venice Commission (2001). *Report on the Preferential Treatment of National Minorities by their Kin-State*, adopted by the Venice Commission at its 48th Plenary Meeting (Venice, 19-20 October 2001) CDL-INF(2001)019-e.